McCormick Theological Seminary
May 10, 2008
Distinguished Service Award
John Buchanan

I am honored deeply to receive this award. Part of what I have learned from my experience at McCormick is that a theological seminary is a very complex enterprise and that it is dependent on the love and generosity and leadership and hard work of many, many volunteers. My sense is that no one has any idea how much volunteer time and energy is required by Board Members and other volunteers who lend their expertise to the responsible management of the institution; its resources and budgets and investments; its physical property; its long-range vision of its mission, and its hopes and dreams. And so, in accepting this recognition, I want to say thank you to all those who have given so generously of their leadership, expertise and resources to McCormick Theological Seminary.

I didn't attend McCormick, but I have come to respect and appreciate its remarkable tradition in theological education and the utterly unique role McCormick plays today in American theological education. I also have a deep regard for President Campbell, the administrative team and the superb faculty which continue to hold the seminary to the highest standards. And our students . . . The thing I loved best about the privilege of serving as Chair of the Board — was helping President Campbell hand diplomas to graduates here in this place. For me it was, and will be today, for Deborah Block, a holy moment, pregnant with hope, when they walk across the chancel of this great building: women and men from many nations, many races, young and middle aged and not-so-young, first career, second career, third career, single people and not so single, married with children sitting in the pews watching with curious wonder as Mommy or Daddy — wearing a black robe and funny hat, with maybe a tear or two, is handed a rolled up piece of paper.

So much sacrifice — so much commitment — so much hope — in that moment and I thank you for the privilege of it.

There is so much to love about McCormick.

Unapologetically urban — in one of the liveliest neighborhoods in one of the liveliest cities in the world.

Intentionally diverse and ecumenical —living with a sister Lutheran seminary — and showing the world what the future of viable theological education looks like.

Here — close by one of the great Universities in the world, where I am told there are more religious scholars per square block than anywhere in the world outside of Rome.

For all these reasons, McCormick Theological Seminary prepares leaders for a church that is coming but is not yet here — a church in a world changing rapidly in front of our eyes — a world that is radically globalized, radically diverse — a world, we Christians still maintain, that is the apple of God's eye: a world God's spirit continues to create: a world God passionately loves and for which God's son died.

A world that needs the kind of men and women who walk across the chancel of Rockefeller Chapel on a Saturday afternoon every May.

It is a great privilege to be part of this and I thank you for it.